

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 09948 01 OF 02 161610Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 IO-13 ISO-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00
COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 INR-07 NEA-10 NSAE-00
USIA-06 OPIC-03 SP-02 TRSE-00 LAB-04 EPG-02
SIL-01 AGRE-00 OMB-01 PA-01 PRS-01 /087 W
-----161715Z 094717 /53

R 161519Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5129
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 09948

USEEC
GENEVA ALSO FOR USMTN
PARIS ALSO FOR USOECD

E.O.11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: ETRD, PINR, UK
SUBJECT: LEO PLIATZKY: NEW PERMANENT SECRETARY AT
DEPARTMENT OF TRADE

1. LEO PLIATZKY, SECOND PERMANENT SECRETARY AT HM
TREASURY, WILL TAKE OVER THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE'S TOP
CAREER JOB AS PERMANENT SECRETARY ON JUNE 21. SIR LEO,
SINCE HE WAS ELEVATED TO KNIGHTHOOD (KCB) ON THE QUEEN'S
HONOUR LIST LAST WEEK, HAS A LONG ESTABLISHED REPUTATION
AS A CIVIL SERVANT WITH A SHARP INTELLECTUAL APPROACH TO
PROBLEMS, A HARD-NOSED ATTITUDE IN PUSHING HOME TOUGH
DECISIONS, COLORFUL LANGUAGE AND LEGENDARY ENERGY. HE
HAS BEEN ONE OF THE TREASURY'S MOST DISTINCTIVE POST-WAR
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PAGE 02 LONDON 09948 01 OF 02 161610Z

CHARACTERS AND IT HAS BEEN SAID HE HASN'T A DROP OF
BLOOD IN HIS VEINS -- IT'S ALL ADRENALINE.

2. BORN INTO AN IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN 1919, PLIATZKY GREW
UP IN FAIRLY MODEST CIRCUMSTANCES, AND NOW TAKES CONSID-
ERABLE PRIDE IN HAVING RISEN TO THE TOP OF HIS PROFESSION.
HIS EARLY EDUCATION WAS AT MANCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL,

WHERE MANY BRIGHT BUT POOR BOYS BEGAN THEIR CLIMB. HE ATTENDED THE PRESTIGIOUS CORPUS CRISTI COLLEGE AT OXFORD, PROBABLY ON A SCHOLARSHIP, AND TOOK FIRST-CLASS CLASSICAL HONORS IN 1939. HE WAS A CLASSMATE OF THE PRESENT CHANCELLOR, DENIS HEALEY, AND REPORTEDLY A FELLOW COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBER. WHILE SERVING IN THE ROYAL ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS FROM 1940-45, HE WAS MENTIONED IN DISPATCHES FOR BRAVERY. HE THEN TOOK A FIRST CLASS IN PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS AND ECONOMICS (PPE) IN 1946. HIS FIRST JOB WAS RESEARCH SECRETARY TO THE FABIAN SOCIETY, 1946-47.

3. PLIATZKY'S LONG AND VARIED GOVERNMENT CAREER BEGAN IN 1947 AT THE MINISTRY OF FOOD. IN 1950 HE SHIFTED TO HM TREASURY WHERE HE MOVED STEADILY UP TO SECOND PERMANENT SECRETARY.

4. FOR MANY YEARS HE WAS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES SECTOR OF THE TREASURY, WHICH EQUATES CLOSELY TO OMB IN THE UNITED STATES, HAVING EARLIER SERVED ON THE INTERNATIONAL SIDE OF TREASURY. HE MOVED UP THROUGH THE GENERAL EXPENDITURE SIDE AS A DEPUTY SECRETARY BEFORE BEING PROMOTED TO HIS PRESENT POSITION IN CHARGE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES SECTOR, WHICH ENCOMPASSES BOTH GENERAL EXPENDITURES AND PUBLIC SERVICES.

5. HE WAS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR INSURING THE RECENT SUCCESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CASH LIMITS POLICY WHICH APPLIED TO GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES. HE SUCCEEDED WHEN VERY FEW OBSERVERS CONSIDERED THE MEASURES WOULD

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 LONDON 09948 01 OF 02 161610Z

BE EFFECTIVE. POLITICALLY ASTUTE, HE SOUGHT WAYS OF ENLISTING PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES AS ALLIES.

6. PLIATZKY'S HEALTH WAS SERIOUSLY IMPAIRED ABOUT A YEAR AGO. WE UNDERSTAND HE LOST THE USE OF AN EYE, BUT SEEMS TO HAVE LARGELY RECOVERED NOW. HE IS A GRUFF AND FAIR-MINDED MAN, AND ADMIRES THOSE WHO ESTABLISH A RATIONAL INTELLECTUAL APPROACH AND FIGHT FOR IT. HE IS WELL LIKED AND ADMIRER BY HIS HM TREASURY ASSOCIATES FOR HIS COURAGE AND INTELLECTUAL ABILITY. THESE TRAITS UNDOUBTEDLY STOOD HIM WELL WITH HEALEY AND ASSISTED HIS UPWARD PROGRESS. HE IS UNLIKELY TO STAND ON CEREMONY AND WHEN ASKED BY AN EMBASSY OFFICER "HOW DOES AN OLD REPROBATE LIKE YOU RATE A KNIGHTHOOD?" HE REPLIED, "THEY HAVE TO GIVE THEM TO SOMEBODY, WHY NOT ME?" (IN FACT, A FAILURE TO ELEVATE A PERMANENT SECRETARY TO THE KNIGHTHOOD WOULD BE SEEN AS QUITE UNUSUAL.)

7. HIS MOVE TO TRADE WAS NOT PART OF THE FREQUENTLY

WELL-PLANNED AND ORGANIZED SERIES OF SHIFTS AT THE UPPER
LEVELS OF THE BRITISH CIVIL SERVICE. DOT'S PRESENT
PERMANENT SECRETARY, PETER THORNTON, RETIRES THIS MONTH

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PAGE 01 LONDON 09948 02 OF 02 161616Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 09948

AND IT HAD LONG BEEN UNDERSTOOD HIS REPLACEMENT WOULD BE
ROY DENMAN WHO SUBSEQUENTLY WENT TO THE EC COMMISSION.
IN THE ENSUING SCUFFLE, THE JOB WAS OFFERED TO SIR DEREK
MITCHELL AT TREASURY, WHO DECLINED IN ORDER TO TAKE A JOB
IN PRIVATE FINANCE. ENTER PLIATZKY, SAYING IF MITCHELL
DIDN'T WANT THE JOB, HE DID.

8. PLIATZKY HAS ABOUT TWO YEARS BEFORE RETIREMENT AT 60
TO MAKE HIS MARK AT TRADE WHERE THERE SHOULD BE SOME
SCOPE FOR HIS ENERGY AND HIS ZEAL TO GET THINGS DONE. HE
FOLLOWS A MAN WHO SEEMS TO HAVE HAD NO GREAT IMPACT.

9. WE HAVE LITTLE INDICATION AT THIS POINT OF THE SUB-
STANTIVE VIEWS PLIATZKY HOLDS ON MAJOR TRADE ISSUES, BUT
IT CAN BE ASSUMED HE WILL BE A NOT-TOO-SUBTLE ACTIVIST
IN THE DEFENSE OF BRITISH TRADE INTERESTS. THE SHIFT TO

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PAGE 02 LONDON 09948 02 OF 02 161616Z

FULL EC RESPONSIBILITY FOR EXTERNAL TRADE AFFAIRS ON JULY 1 WILL OF COURSE CONSTRAIN PLIATZKY'S ACTIONS, BUT HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE ENERGETIC IN COMMUNITY FORUMS AND WILL LIKELY SEEK TO PUT A BIT MORE STEEL IN THE BACKBONES OF UK DOT REPRESENTATIVES TO VARIOUS EC GROUPS.

10. PLIATZKY'S DEPARTMENT HAS LITTLE DIRECT CONTROL OVER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMERCIAL POLICY ABROAD: THIS IS DONE BY FCO STAFF. IT IS REPORTED THAT THE (AS YET UNPUBLISHED) STUDY BY THE CENTRAL POLICY REVIEW STAFF OF BRITAIN'S OVERSEAS REPRESENTATION SUGGESTS PUTTING THE OVERSEAS TRADE SERVICE UNDER THE DOT. HOWEVER, THIS HAS BEEN OPPOSED BY THE FCO AND PLIATZKY HAS MENTIONED TO US THAT HE DOESN'T FAVOR THIS CHANGE.

11. PLIATZKY'S RECORD AT TREASURY SUGGESTS THAT HE WILL SEEK A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRADE MINISTER, AND PUT HIS VIEWS FORCIBLY TO HIM WITH A VIEW TO INFLUENCING KEY CABINET DECISIONS. HIS ARRIVAL AT DOT MAY LEAD TO A RESURGENCE OF THAT DEPARTMENT'S ROLE IN TRADE AND RELATED AREAS.

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